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SUBJECT: KUWAIT RECEIVES IRAQI POLITICAL FIGURES IN RUN-UP
TO PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Classified By: Political Counselor Pete O'Donohue for reasons 1.4 b and
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¶1. (C) Former Iraqi PM Dr. Ibrahim Al-Jaafari held a series of high-level meetings in Kuwait on December 12 and 13 including with the Amir, Parliamentary Speaker, and National Security Bureau (NSB). While the visits were publicly portrayed as focused on building bilateral relations, Al-Jaafari also advocated privately for support for his National Reform Bloc in upcoming elections. In other recent Iraqi visits, the Governor of Basra Province met with his Ahmadi Governorate counterpart January 17 and with the Parliamentary Speaker and Foreign Minister on January 18 to tout investment opportunities in Basra; the GOK reportedly will fund construction of a hospital in Basra. Iraqi Shia religious and political leader Mohammed Bahr Al-Aloum met with the Parliament Speaker on January 18. The increased tempo of visits ahead of Iraq's March parliamentary elections reflects the GoK's desire to nurture -- including financially -- relationships with Iraqi politicians viewed as being less hard-line than PM Maliki. Such support may be part of a concerted effort of a group of states -- comprising Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE -- which GoK sources say consult regularly and coordinate on Iraq policy, including common approaches toward the upcoming Iraqi polls. End Summary.

¶2. (C) MFA U/S Khaled Jarallah told Ambassador on January 13 that, in a meeting with Foreign Minister Dr. Mohammed Al-Sabah, Dr. Al-Jaafari -- former Iraqi PM and head of the National Reform Bloc -- claimed that he told Kurdish President Talabani that it was time for an Arab Sunni rather than a Kurd to be President (presumably as a way to bring the Sunni more fully into the upcoming elections.) Jarallah said Al-Jaafari emphatically denied, however, that any such politician would come from senior Baathist ranks. Ambassador also encountered Al-Jaafari on January 13 when the latter was bidding farewell to NSB Deputy Shaykh Thamer Al Sabah (who had just sat in on Jaafari's meeting with NSB chief Mohammed Khalid Al Sabah.) Thamer told Ambassador that Al-Jaafari's discussion with NSB chief Shaykh Mohammed revolved around the upcoming elections, the role of the Sunni, and the potential for resurgence of the Baath party. Shaykh Thamer noted speculation that Iraqi Front for National Dialogue leader Saleh Al-Mutlak was trying to rebuild the Baath party on the back of his parliamentary victory, but dismissed the possibility because Al-Mutlak's party had so few seats in parliament. NSB head Shaykh Mohammed Khalid Al Sabah separately confided to Ambassador January 20 that a group of like-minded states -- comprising Kuwait, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordanian and the UAE -- had met in Istanbul to discuss shared security concerns regarding Iraq, to include policy towards the upcoming parliamentary elections.

¶3. (C) During a January 18 call on the Iraqi Embassy, Polcouns queried CDA Ajwad Al-Azzawi about the import of

Al-Jaafari's visit. Polcouns noted that Al-Jaafari's publicly reported meetings in Kuwait -- which included a session with the Amir, Crown Prince and Foreign Minister and a separate session with National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Kharafi and a number of MPs -- were briefly noted in the Kuwaiti press, which stated that the focus of the meetings was on cementing bilateral relations in the interests of the two "sisterly countries," but provided little additional detail. CDA Al-Azzawi told Polcouns that Al-Jaafari's visit was primarily to discuss the prospects of his National Reform Bloc in the upcoming Iraqi elections. Al-Azzawi noted that Jaafari plans to stand as a candidate in the elections and was essentially using the visit as a "getting to know you" opportunity to assuage Kuwaiti concerns about his largely Shiite coalition, which will stand in opposition to a reportedly more broadly-based coalition headed by Former Iraqi PM Ayad Allawi.

14. (C) Al-Azzawi, who sat in on part of Al-Jaafari's meeting with the Amir, Crown Prince and FM, said the Amir reiterated to Al-Jaafari at least three times his hope that the Iraqi elections will proceed smoothly. Al-Azzawi said the Amir and Crown Prince then dismissed the room for a private meeting with Al-Jaafari, excluding even the Foreign Minister. Al-Azzawi said he did not know what transpired during that exchange. (Note: Kuwait's Ambassador to Iraq, Ali Al-Mou'min, told Polcouns that he had sat in on a separate meeting Al-Jaafari had with the FM and other MFA officials, including MFA U/S Khaled Jarallah. According to Al-Mou'min, Al-Jaafari used the meeting to promote his coalition, discuss investment prospects in Iraq, and note his dedication to good bilateral relations; Al-Mou'min said the general sense of the meetings was that bilateral relations are improving, but

there won't be any breakthroughs prior to the elections End Note.)

15. (C) Polcouns also asked CDA Al-Azzawi about an ongoing (January 17 - 19) visit by Basra Governor Shaltag Aboud, which came at the invitation of the Kuwaiti Governor of Ahmadi Province, Shaykh Dr. Ibrahim Al-Duaij Al Sabah. Media accounts quoted Aboud as keen to bolster friendship and cooperation with Kuwait. In a press conference, Aboud told reporters that Basra is "safe and stable" and claimed there are good investment opportunities in the province, which contains a high proportion of Iraq's oil. Al-Azzawi -- who griped that he had only been invited to attend any events related to the Governor's visit -- at the last minute and by the GOK -- said Aboud's visit had been organized by a Lebanese businessman, but encouraged and "supported" by the GOK. Azzawi said he believed the GOK is interested in pursuing investment opportunities in Basra and views the Governor's visit as a way to build relationships to the province; he downplayed, however, the potential for investment opportunities in Basra, opining that, in fact, there has been little development in the province and investment decisions remain firmly in the hands of authorities in Baghdad. Al-Azzawi said the meeting between Governor Aboud and Ahmadi Governor Al Sabah was an end in itself as a "bridge builder" but that little else came out of the meeting. He also suggested that Aboud is "PM Maliki's man" and his visit is intended to convey the idea that PM Maliki's government is "open for business." Al-Azzawi said Aboud will meet with the Kuwaiti Chamber of Commerce on January 19 to brief on investment opportunities. (Note: According to Kuwaiti press sources, Governor Aboud also met with the Foreign Minister and National Assembly Speaker on January 18. CDA Al-Azzawi did not appear to be aware of these meetings; nor did he appear aware of GOK plans to build a hospital in Basra, a decision announced in Kuwait's official press on January 19 in connection with Aboud's visit. End Note.)

16. (U) Press sources reported that Parliament Speaker Jassem Al-Kharafi also met January 18 with Iraqi Shia religious leader and political activist Mohammed Bahr Al-Uloun (a frequent visitor to Kuwait) in a session in which the Speaker reportedly reiterated Kuwait's keen desire to see security

and stability restored to Iraq; Bahr Al-Aloum reportedly responded with a note of appreciation for Kuwait's humane support.

17. (C) Comment: While carefully couched in public terms as building bilateral ties and promoting investment opportunities, recent visits by senior Iraqis are clearly intended to help Kuwait curry favor with possible future Iraqi power brokers, and for Iraqi politicians to obtain quiet financial support. The GoK appears comfortable casting a relatively broad net in terms of which Iraqis it will welcome and assist, suggesting a pragmatism and an approach that perhaps can best be defined as a preference for "ABM" -- Anyone But Maliki. End Comment.

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